



Our current population of 25 million could double to 50 million in less than 50 years. PHOTO: AAP

Australia eyes 50 million by 2066

John Kehoe

Australia's population could virtually double to nearly 50 million people in less than 50 years and will grow even if there was significant cuts to immigration levels, according to new projections published by the Australian Bureau of Statistics.

The current 25 million population is tipped to rise to 30 million between 2029 and 2033, based on economic assumptions of future levels of fertility, life expectancy and migration.

NSW will remain the most populated state and reach more than 9 million within a decade, although Victoria is assumed to experience the largest and fastest increase to approach 8 million residents by 2027.

By 2066, the ABS says the national population will be between 37 million and 49 million.

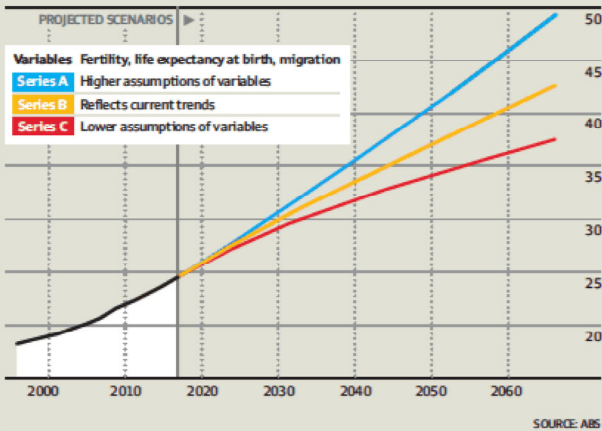
The bureau's central scenario, based on current trends in fertility, life expectancy at birth and migration, would see Australia have 42 million people in 48 years.

But the ultimate result will depend on rates of births, living ages and the politically-hot button issue of immigration levels, which the government is considering trimming.

Macquarie University professor of demography Nick Parr said the projections show a substantial increase in people. He said the ABS assumed 100,000 more births than deaths each year. "If these projections end up true, then even a draconian zero migration policy would not prevent further growth," Mr Parr said.

Big Australia

Population (million)



The ABS' central scenario assumes annual net overseas migration of 225,000 people, similar to recent years.

The existing annual permanent migration cap is 190,000, excluding humanitarian visas, trans-Tasman migration from New Zealand, temporary students and working holidaymakers.

The government has indicated it wants the cap lowered to about 160,000 – around the level inflows will fall to this year anyway.

Minister for Population Alan Tudge said under the government's population plan the growth of Sydney and Melbourne was likely to

be slower than past years in order to allow the infrastructure to catch up and keep up.

"The Prime Minister will be asking the state and territory governments to inform him of what their population carrying capacity is for their existing and planned infrastructure and services," Mr Tudge said.

"We anticipate that this will lead to a reduction in our current migration settings, particularly into Sydney ... It will also assist those regional areas ... which presently cannot find enough people for the jobs available."

The Regional Australia Institute estimates there are 47,000 job vacancies in the regions.